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"LES MALADES" OF FRANÇOIS MAURIAC

by

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MAESTRA NORNAL, NUESTRA SENORA DEL ROSARIO
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Montana State University

1949

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INTRODUCTION

In the dedication of one of his best known novels, Genitrix,¹ François Mauriac says the following:

"A mon frère le Docteur Pierre Mauriac.
Je confie ces malades, en témoignage de ma
tendre admiration. F. M."

and the title of an early book of his essays is Quelques
coeurs inquiets.

The more one reads of the works of this contemporary French author, the more one is struck with the fact that his principal characters are "des malades", and a study of these "malades" is the subject of this thesis. In order to understand them and to evaluate them properly it may be wise to look briefly into the life of the author, and into the period and milieu which produced him, for, as the French critic and literary historian Taine says, every literary work depends on the "race, moment et milieu" in which it is produced.

In 1870-71 France suffered at the hands of the Germans one of the most crushing and humiliating defeats

¹This novel will be treated later in this paper.

of her history. From that time up until the outbreak of the First World War she went through a period of social and political unrest, seeking in many directions for some panacea. Her disillusionment, however, went deeper into her history than this defeat. The Revolution had failed to effect its proposed ameliorations in the social structure and the century following it was one of political and social instability, in spite of a certain material prosperity and the consolidation of an extensive empire. The defeat at the hands of the Germans only served to accentuate some basic faults within this social structure and moral life of the people. The ideas of socialism and of communism became popular. Catholicism, which had been somewhat discredited in this essentially Catholic nation, took on a new militant aspect. Many who had never left the Church now became its crusading partisans. Others were converted to its beliefs, or returned to them after having wandered from the fold.

In literature the naturalism of the school of Zola gave way to a number of other movements, notable among which were symbolism, neo-romanticism and the so-called Catholic school of writers.

In philosophy the materialistic positivism of Aug-

uste Comte was challenged by the intuitive, optimistic, "elan vital" of Bergson and his school.

But the French spirit has never been at rest, and the day is long past when men have believed that they have found the "ideal". And so our author, Mauriac, was born into a period of particular unrest, and one which greatly affected his own nature. He was born in Bordeaux in 1885 and was raised in a devout Catholic family. Very little information concerning his intimate life has been available. However, it is known that his father died when he was still quite young, and that his mother, a very pious woman, raised her children under strict discipline. The eldest son became a doctor, the second a lawyer, the third a priest, and Francois, a writer. His earliest education was received in church schools. His vacations were spent near his mother in and around Bordeaux. That city and its surrounding country are the settings for his best literary production, for he understands the spirit of its people and the influence of its landscapes better than those of any other part of France. His people were well-to-do, gaining their wealth from their vineyards. His work can not be separated from the lonely agricultural landscapes and farmhouses of the Landes, or wastelands covered with pine forests around Bordeaux, and although there is little

or no connection between the plots of his different works, family names--such as that of the Peloueyre family--appear in more than one of them.

There is a striking sameness about the works of this author. He does not succeed in creating many different types in different milieux. His interest is in persons rather than in manners, and these persons, as has been pointed out above, are frequently "des inquiets". He has a talent for evoking atmosphere and he uses only a stroke of the pen to do so. His landscapes are vague but effective. His characters are not minutely drawn, and he interests himself in only brief periods of their lives but we feel nevertheless that we know them, in so far as one person can ever really know another.

Mauriac was still a young man when he went to Paris to finish his studies and to seek his fortune. There he has spent most of his life, while the rest of the Mauriacs have remained in the valley of the Gironde. Fidus, in an article concerning the author, has said:

. . . Il est moins installé que campé à Paris. Il a ses relations, ses habitudes, sa haute situation littéraire, a la fois cette solitude et cette vie de conversation, ce coup de fouet qu'on ne trouve que là; il y a transporté son foyer et sa table de travail, avec son vieux Pascal de l'édition Braunschvicg, culotté et couvert

de notes, qui ne le quitte pas depuis sa rhétorique; il n'y vit jamais qu'à demi. Peut-être ce qu'il préfère encore dans Paris, c'est d'y exaspérer une certaine qualité de spleen qui décuple son regret de la seule chose qu'il aime et prête à sa vision la puissance du désir.²

André Maurois, who very justly places Mauriac in the "lignée Chateaubriand-Barrès" among French prose writers and who calls him "l'homme d'un seul terroir" speaks of him at this period, when he arrived in Paris, in the following manner:

. . . L'enfant chétif était devenu un jeune homme de rare et agressive beauté, tête de grand d'Espagne, transfigurée par le Greco. Il avait de l'esprit, de la drôlerie, et même une certaine méchanceté satirique que Paris était loin de reprouver.³

Perhaps Mauriac has done well to limit his scene to one locale with which he is thoroughly familiar. In this connection Fidus says:

. . . Pour un homme ainsi fait, la vie de province offrait 'tout ce qu'il faut pour écrire'. Dans ces milieux resserrés où tout le monde s'observe et se connaît, où l'on tient registre des alliances et de l'état des fortunes, ou la mémoire des

²Fidus, "M. François Mauriac", Révue des deux mondes, Vol. 15, May-June 1933, p. 788.

³André Maurois, Études littéraires, Vol. II, 1944, p, 21

scandales se conserve jusqu'à la cinquième génération, où il existe pour toutes les faiblesses un espionnage et une police mutuelle et assidue, un des intérêts de la vie, est d'organiser contre le voisin un système de défense et d'opposer aux curieux une façade impénétrable. Sauver les apparences! Dissimuler sa position!⁴

If Mauriac is preoccupied in his works with the country and the people in and around Bordeaux, it is not his intention to paint either sympathetically. For he brings out all the meanness, hypocrisy, miserliness, and self-interest of the latter, and he leaves us with a feeling of the bleakness of the former. He has a penetrating sense of observation, and succeeds, with a few words, in revealing the face behind the mask. He is interested in the cult of Mammon. The preservation of family fortunes occupies an important place in his backgrounds, and the matter of "rang" in marriages and social relationships can never be forgotten.

Again Maurois very justly says that

. . . L'amour-passion est rare chez eux, mais ils sont hommes et la Chair les tourmente. Les vieux célibataires, héritiers de vignes et de landes, se paient des épouses jeunes et fraîches, ou bien chachent, en quelque appartement secret de Bordeaux

⁴Fidus, op. cit., p. 795.

ou d'Angoulême, une maitresse qu'ils entre-tiennent pauvrement et traitent avec une méprisante dureté. Les adolescents, eux, sont écartelés entre l'appel de la Chair et la terreur du Péché. Ils entrent dans la vie avec un idéal de pureté mais sont incapable d'y être fidèles. . . . Et ceux qui cèdent à la tentation sont-ils plus heureux?⁵

Mauriac, who is considered by some French critics to be one of France's greatest and most significant living authors, came to prominence only after the First World War, in which he is said to have served. Strange to say, that war is scarcely mentioned by him, though a faint allusion is made to it from time to time. Did he suffer little from it, and did it make little impression on him, or does he avoid it to prevent his works from becoming dated? Certainly he seems very little interested in social catastrophes or in society as a whole. His interest lies rather in the sick minds of individuals and their sickness is not due to the contemplation of suffering humanity but rather to conditions inherent in themselves.

It has been pointed out time and again by the critics that this author's autobiography is to be found in his works, and from his constant preoccupation with the

⁵Mauvois, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

same general types of situations, the landscape of his native Bordeaux, the recurrence of families, whome he must have known well, we can judge that this is so. He is continually concerned with young men. They dominate his works. They are tragic figures, faced with the problems of life and its meaning, and, for the most part, unable ever to find a satisfactory solution. To say that they are unhappy and frustrated is to understate their situations. Certainly they are all introverts. Is it a question of religion, of love, of sex, of money, of social position, of physical handicaps, of profession, or of being dominated by some stronger personality? Perhaps we may be able to suggest an answer to that question after considering individually our author's works, but the answer is not an easy one, and he does not give it to us for he is no psychoanalyst.

. . . Non pas que la psychologie de Mauriac cherche à s'enfoncer dans les mystères du subconscient ou de l'inconscient; elle ne prétend pas nous apporter des révélations sur des forces inconnues qui meuvent les âmes; elle s'en tient, pour ainsi dire, à des données tout à fait classiques; les personnages obéissent à des vices latents, cèdent à des tentations obscures parce que par lâcheté et par hypocrisie, ils ne veulent pas voir clair en eux-mêmes; au surplus ils sont très souvent parfaitement

clairvoyants.⁶

Mauriac is usually considered a Catholic writer. However, this designation may be misleading to many a reader, particularly if he anticipates, on approaching the works of this man, to find a story dealing with a Christian martyr; of good triumphing over evil; of moral people. On the contrary one is impressed with the immoral nature of his people, as we usually think of such things; of their evil natures; of their perverseness; of their lack of the deeper and of the tender emotions associated with love and affection. They are capable of crimes of every hue, including murder and suicide. Love is never a tender thing, if it exists at all, but is a tenacious, possessive thing, which does not inspire the usual virtues of self-sacrifice and self-forgetfulness; it is a dominating, a smothering force. Therefore it is difficult to understand the term "Catholic writer" as applied to this author who deals so much with diseased minds and conflicting emotions, and who seems so fascinated with the carnal. One must look deeper. One must consider, to

⁶Daniel Mornet, Histoire de la littérature et de la pensée française contemporaines, 1870-1934, p. 136.

understand the Christian aspect of the work of Mauriac, that great preoccupation of his--grace. But that is a subject for another thesis and it will be impossible to treat it here. However, it may be of interest to quote the words of Daniel Hornet concerning this much discussed aspect:

. . . Mauriac veut être d'abord un romancier catholique; il nous apporte une explication de la destinée qui doit nous apprendre à faire notre salut de catholique. L'oeuvre aurait pu n'être ainsi qu'une exhortation dévote. Mais la dévotion, austère et rude, du romancier, n'est qu'un des aspects de son temperament. Avant de juger la vie, en catholique, il la voit et il la peint avec une précision et une intensité, qui donnent à son oeuvre non seulement une vérité religieuse, mais encore une vérité humaine. Vérité sombre et presque cruelle. Les âmes de ses personnages, même les meilleurs et les moins mauvais, sont habitées par des passions violentes, tyranniques et basses. Sans cesse, le péché, c'est-à-dire, les passions brutales ou égoïstes, les tourments ou les commande. Et ce sont ces passions bien souvent qui triomphent, et qui font de la vie un spectacle décourageant. . . . Sans cesse les personnages nous apparaissent non comme les creatures de l'auteur, mais comme des êtres de chair et de sang qui souffrent et vivent devant nous.

Mauriac has maintained that writing is a necessity with him, and that if his personages are not pleasing he

⁷Ibid.

has had to paint them as he has found them, always engaged in the struggle between God and Mammon. He has maintained that he could not be a successful writer if he were to separate these two aspects of man--the body and the soul.

One cannot, of course, escape the consideration of the Freudian aspect in all of these strange people which Mauriac has created, or more probably painted from real life. But Freud would attribute all the maladjustments of man to sexual reasons. It would be taking much for granted thus to explain these "malades", for the struggle against the demands of sex among his characters is usually a short and losing one, if it is a struggle, and the influences of such things as heredity, physical defects, parents lacking in affection, feelings of inferiority with regard to one's social relations, religious considerations and what is frequently denoted by the term "Weltschmerz"--that inexplicable something--seem more frequently to explain the frustrations which abound in them. Furthermore, a Freudian study of these characters is not within the scope of this work, and would call for a specialist in this field. The interest here is simply to show these people as ill. Therefore, one can admit the possibility of a Freudian explanation for the conflicts within some of them, while doubting that it is the answer to the whole

problem.

It should be noted that no mention has been made anywhere, in the critical material reviewed for this thesis, of Mauriac's ever having been married, nor has reference been found concerning any liaison which he has had with a woman. This is unusual, to say the least, among French writers, and may have something to do with the coldness of the author's approach to all matters having to do with love, marriage, children and the usual affection one is accustomed to associate with the family circle.

The fact that Mauriac became a member of the Academie Francaise when he was still quite young attests to his pre-eminent place among French men of letters.

CHAPTER I

SKETCHES OF WORKS BY THE AUTHOR WITH CRITICAL COMMENTARY

L'ENFANT CHARGÉ DE CHÂÎNES

1913

L'Enfant chargé de chaînes was the first novel of Mauriac, and was published in 1913. Three years before he had published a collection of poems, Les Mains jointes, which had been well received in literary circles, and of which Maurice Barrès has said, "Depuis vingt ans je me donne la musique charmante de cet incennu, dont je ne sais rien, qui chante à mi voix ses souvenirs d'enfance toute une vie facile, préservé scrupuleuse, rêveuse, d'enfant catholique. . . C'est le poème de l'enfant des familles heureuses, des petites garçons sages, délicats, bien élevés, dont rien n'a ternie la lumière, mais trop sensibles, avec une note folle de volupté. . . ."¹

Not having read his poems, but on the basis of his later works, one can follow Barrès to a certain point. However, one is led to wonder if the childhood of the writer to whom he refers was a happy one, for childhood makes such a deep impression on one that that impression

¹ André Maurois, Études littéraires, Vol. II, 1944, p. 14.

is never erased, and we get the feeling from reading the works of Mauriac that it is, almost without exception, an unhappy childhood which conditions his frustrated adults. Nevertheless, many points of this judgement concerning his early poems are applicable to his novels. We find in them 'souvenirs d'enfance', 'souvenirs d'une vie catholique', 'une ame trop sensible' which at the same time bears 'une note de folle volupte'.

While we would expect this first novel to be less mature, less well written than his later ones, there is only one important difference between it and those which have followed it. That difference is that the main character, Jean-Paul Johanet, seems, at the end to have found some solution to his problems, while in the others the story ends, or the main character dies--sometimes a violent death--without having found such a solution, although the matter of grace may be projected into the plot as a sort of 'deus ex machina'.

L'Enfant chargé de chaînes is the story of a young student of twenty years, Jean-Paul Johanet, who has been pursuing his studies in Paris, while his father, a silent and lonely figure, lives alone, preoccupied with his hunting, on his estate near Bordeaux. The mother has died during Jean-Paul's youth, and has left him sufficient

money to make him independent. The worldly and complex nature of the son has created a barrier between him and his father. However, the father loves and admires the son, in his own way.

Jean-Paul lacks the enthusiasms usual to a youth of his age. He has never had to struggle for anything he has wanted or needed, but life has no meaning to him. Nor have his intellectual pursuits given it a meaning, although he has sought solutions in music and books. He is mentally superior to his friends and finds little intellectual pleasure in their presence. Even the juvenile amorous pleasures, not uncommon among French youths, do not attract him.

A friend of his childhood, Vincent Hieron, introduced him into the circle, 'Amour et Foi', a religious organization--Catholic and Jansenist--whose main purpose is the propagation of the faith, and the conquest of souls, particularly among youths of the working classes. The leader of the Parisian section of this circle is a man of great abilities and a magnetic personality, Jérôme Servet. He is liked, nearly worshipped, by his young followers, who dispute among themselves the honor of being his favorites. Jean-Paul becomes a member and eventually goes with the group to Bordeaux on a soul-saving campaign.

He tries desperately to overcome his ego-centric nature and seems to succeed momentarily. He offers his friendship to a young and enthusiastic convert, George Elie, but soon realizes that they have nothing in common except their interest in this cause. George becomes repulsive to him and he has to find excuses not to see him. The latter comes to hate Jean-Paul because of this break in their friendship and denounces him as being class-conscious to Jerome Servet, their leader. This results in his exclusion from the circle.

Following this episode Jean-Paul goes to the home of his father in the country. On the neighboring property lives his cousin, Marthe, with whom he has been on the friendliest terms since their childhood. Lately they had rarely seen each other, although Marthe had long been in love with Jean-Paul. At the end of a pleasant vacation Jean-Paul returns to Paris. The old doubts and troubles of his life soon come to the surface again. This time he resolves to attempt a solution by following the dictates of his desires and passions. And so, for a time, he follows the primrose path. All of this leads him nowhere. He finds himself with a still greater feeling of loss and insecurity. He becomes ever more disgusted with life, going so far as to seriously contemplate suicide. He de-

sides on a return to religion, and goes through a period of profound repentance for his loss of time in vain pleasures.

He feels an overwhelming need for human support in his new religious frame of mind. He thinks of Marthe, and starts writing her about his problems and torments. She, being a woman and in love, is extremely happy to listen. The following vacation he returns to the country and becomes engaged to Marthe. However, before marrying he wants to repair, at least in part, the wrong he has done to Georges Elie through his selfishness. Learning that Georges is ill, he goes to see him, in the hope that he can help him, financially or otherwise. Georges refuses to see him, desiring less than anything his compassion. Jean-Paul realizes for the first time that repentance and good will are not enough to carry through a worthy action.

As has been suggested above, the author does not leave his main character, Jean-Paul, in despair. He will doubtless marry Marthe and perhaps his youthful searchings will have ended, with new preoccupations concerning a wife and family. If a solution can be said to have been found in this case, it is hardly true in Mauriac's later novels. For although he picks up his characters at a moment of crisis, and does not deal with long periods of their lives,

there is no solution of their problems--unless it be death--after the highest point of that crisis has been reached, and if his characters live on after our acquaintance with them has ceased, we cannot see for them any happiness. But is this not tragedy in the traditional sense of the word?

LA CHAIR ET LE SANG

1920

Claude Favereau comes home from the Seminary, after having come to the decision not to enter a religious order. He had been drawn back to the country by his youth and his lust for life which were opposed to the cloister.

His parents were the overseers of an extensive property, covered mostly with vineyards, on the shores of the Garonne near Bordeaux. They are hard working peasants. His father is a rude, dominating man, who likes to drink at any time of the day. His mother is completely subdued to her husband's will, rather introverted and seldom says a word.

The former owner of the property had died, and the new landlord is expected within the next few days. He is M. Dupont-Gunther who will come with his daughter May and his son Edward. M. Dupont-Gunther has been a widower for many years and has required, therefore, the services of a

housekeeper. She is a Spanish woman who once was his mistress and now wants to marry her daughter to Monsieur. That is the reason for bringing the daughter, Edith Gonzales, to the country place.

When May and Edward come to the property, they meet Claude, the young peasant, and the three become very good friends--a friendship of great importance to each of them, in spite of the differences in their social stations and interests. Claude is intelligent and has intellectual interests but knows little about life and still feels the strong influence of the seminary. May and her brother are protestants and Claude, in the belief that he has the only true religion, tries to convert May by telling her all about his faith.

She is still a child, because she has been living as such, enormously proud of her purity of action and thought. Her brother, Edward, is a sophisticated youth, who has lived all his life in Paris. He is satiated already with Parisian pleasures and does not know what to do to overcome the tediousness of life. He is very much attracted by the frankness and spontaneity of Claude.

Their friendship goes on for a while, sufficient time for Edward to get bored and for May and Claude to fall in love with each other. Edward starts his conquest

of Edith, the housekeeper's daughter, and Claude and May are for a certain time happy with their love fantasies. One morning they suddenly face reality when Claude kisses May. This was her greatest desire and so her reaction was extremely violent. Her brother has already left for Paris and feeling abandoned, remorseful and ashamed she seeks a refuge and help in the Catholic church. She was giving another proof of her love, but only unconsciously so, because her conversion was the first step toward an advantageous marriage which her father had planned for her. She had been very opposed to this project, but now it appears to her as the only solution to her troubles.

May marries Marcel Castagnède, following the wishes of her father. Claude's disillusionment is unlimited and he tries to forget, in the physically exhausting work of the land.

May comes to the estate of her father, to pass there her honeymoon. She does not see Claude a single time but he watches her constantly and discovers something unbelievable for him, which is that the girl idealized by him, can find happiness with another man.

At the fatal moment of her engagement, May had felt that her brother, Edward, had abandoned her to a man whom she scarcely knew and she had not seen him since that time.

Meantime he had tried all kinds of occupations and pleasures, finding nothing to interest him. He always returns to thoughts about himself, his mediocrity and his scorn for life. He reaches the point where he fears solitude and begins to take narcotics. He had for a while been living with Edith, who had followed him to Paris thereby ruining the plans of her mother, but this had brought neither happiness. The idea of suicide becomes stronger and stronger in him. One day he flees from Paris without a definite destination. He stops in a little town and from there sends letters to those two beings who might have been able to save him. One is to Claude, in whom he admires the zest for life, and the other one to his mistress, Edith. She does not understand the desperate cry of her former lover and comes too late. Claude has to overcome many difficulties in order to reach him. He had no money himself and his father refused him help and tried to prevent his going. With the help of the village priest he was enabled to leave, after escaping through the window, for his father had locked him in the room. He arrived in time only to repeat with Edward a Pater Noster.

Here we find a mother and father disappointed that their son, Claude--in whom they had placed such fine hopes and who might have added distinction to their lowly posi-

tion by becoming a priest--has chosen to leave the seminary where he was studying and to settle on the land. However, Claude is happy with his parents, who understand him so little, until he falls in love with the daughter of the owner of the property of which his father is the overseer. He has not lost his religion which he tries successfully to pass on to the girl he loves. When their love cannot possibly end happily in marriage Claude and May are both broken hearted, but both have their religion for a refuge.

It is the brother Edward who has inherited all the weaknesses of the flesh of his father and who has sufficient fortune so that he does not need to work; it is this handsome and charming youth who can find nothing in which he can believe, who feels a terrible void in life and who can see no reason for prolonging it. He has tasted of all its fruits and none of them bring him any satisfaction. He is a cynic and is skeptical of everything. He does not truly love anyone, nor is he loved by anyone, other than his sister who cannot understand him.

He decides to commit suicide, but before carrying through this final act, he writes to those two persons who have meant something to him, Claude and Edith, asking them to meet him in an out-of-the-way village. Edith receives his letter and intends to go to him but a social

engagement prevents her getting there in time. Claude is ready to leave immediately when he receives the letter from his friend but time is lost until he succeeds in escaping from his father, and while he is soliciting the necessary money for the trip from the town priest.

Religion is an important factor in this story and perhaps it is grace which finally saves all three of the young characters who are prominent in it. At any rate May is brought into the bosom of the Church and Edward, at the end, has the benefits of the prayers of one of its communicants.

LE BAISER AU LÉPREUX

1922

This book is a series of gloomy and sorrowful pictures. The main character is Jean Pélouyre. His mother had died of tuberculosis when he was born. His father is always sick, sometimes physically, and sometimes only from hysteria. He dominates the household. There is some similarity between him and his sister, Félicité Cazenave, whose acquaintance the reader will make in the sketch of the novel

Génitrix² Each of them has a son and each one dominates that son. In neither case does either have enough independence to escape the domination of his parents.

When the novel begins, Jean is twenty-three years old. Looking into the mirror that reflects his image one gets a good picture of him.

. . . Il était si petit que la basse glace du trumeau refléta sa pauvre mine, ses joues creuses, un nez longue, au bout pointu, rouge et comme usé, pareil à ces sucres d'orge qu'amincissent, en les suçant, de patients garçons. Les cheveux ras s'avancaient en angle aigu sur son front déjà ridé: une grimace découvrit ses gencives, des dents mauvaises. . .³

He suffers from his physical handicaps because he is so fully aware of them. He does not try to compensate for his feelings of inferiority. On the contrary, he abandons himself to those feelings. He is sorry for himself and considers that no one could ever love him.

His father, although sick, has always wanted to have his son near. This is the reason for not even putting him in a school. He only goes there at the end of the school year to take his examinations.

²François Mauriac, Génitrix, Paris VI^e : Bernard Editions, 61 Rue des Saints-Pères, 61, 1923.

³Mauriac, Le Baiser au lépreux, Paris: Bernard Grasset Editeur, 61, Rue des Saint-Pères, 61, 1922.

The village priest was a good friend of the family, and at the same time a very influential person. It was he, who decided that the time had come when Jean should marry. As the boy never had had any relations with women, the priest decided to make the choice of the woman also. Jean considered himself too repulsive to impose his person on anyone.

The priest, after convincing the father of the necessity of a marriage, decides upon all the steps that have to be taken. In this way Jean meets Noémi d'Artiailh. She is a very young and pretty girl. Jean had admired her many times having seen her on the street or in church. Noémi's feelings do not count. Her family considers it an honor to marry their daughter to a young Pélouyre. Whether he is attractive or repulsive is not considered. Of greater importance are his name and his fortune. The poor girl is very disillusioned when she meets Jean, and she marries him only because the priest has decided her role in life for her.

M. Jérôme Pélouyre fears the estrangement of his son nearly as much as his sister Félicité fears to lose her son Fernand in the novel *Génitrix*. When the marriage of Jean is discussed one can find the following words:

" . . . M. Jérôme sanglotait, feignait une attaque, tant il était lâche devant la minute d'angoisse d'une separation. . . ."4

Félicité Cazenave has said concerning her son's marriage: " . . . Si Fernand se marie, ma bru mourra. . . ."5

For a while Jean considered that perhaps his marriage would finally give him freedom and independence but those thoughts are soon overshadowed by his fears. He cannot believe that one day he is going to possess such a pretty girl. After a visit to his bride he says to himself:

" . . . Cette nuit jamais arrivera: une guerre eclatera, quelqu'un mourra, la terre tremblera. . . ."6

Noémi, revolted by the thoughts of the approaching marriage, tries to forget them and to overcome the reluctance she feels. Nevertheless, the next spring they are married, and after a short honeymoon return to live in the house of the Pélouyre family.

Life goes on. Jean, like so many of Mauriac's characters, has no occupation. To free Noémi from his presence he goes hunting. Noémi, on the other hand, tries

⁴Mauriac, Le Baiser au lépreux, p. 40.

⁵Ibid., p. 37.

⁶Ibid., p. 59.

to fulfill her duties as a wife and daughter-in-law. She takes care of father Jérôme Pélouyre as well as she can and develops a real interest in his property. She also tries to be a happy wife and wishes not to show her real feelings to Jean.

The young couple attempts to find some common interests in their faith and in their charitable works.

This life of constant control and tolerance affects Noém's health. It is again the priest who interferes and suggests a trip to Jean. Noémi offers her company but it is decided that she will stay with her father-in-law. Jean is not happy with these new plans. His idea of life is expressed quite well in the following sentence written by Montaigne: ". . . Pour moi, je loue une vie glissante, sombre et muette. . .⁷

He leaves after all, considering the well-being of Noémi. Jean goes to Paris, but instead of doing the research work that had been suggested to him, he roams around. He feels as unhappy there as in any other place of this world. He really does not live, he vegetates. Jean would have passed his days there until death, if he had not been

⁷Ibid., p. 28.

called home by the priest. The priest had learned through Noémi's confessions that in spite of her repugnance of Jean, she needed him.

. . . Bien qu'elle fut incapable d'aucune analyse, elle se sentait autre et, rendu à la vie de jeune fille, connaisse dans sa chair qu'elle n'était plus une jeune fille. . . .⁸

Jean returns sick and weak. Noémi, on the contrary, looks more attractive than ever.

The son of the village doctor, Pieuchon, has tuberculosis. A young doctor from the neighboring town had been called to treat him. Although he failed to cure him, he became well known in the little town.

When Jean returns sick, Jérôme, the father calls that doctor to come to see his son. It is in this way that Noémi gets to know the doctor and immediately feels very much attracted towards that good looking young man. She attracts his attention too, but they have no opportunity to get better acquainted. Noémi's loyalties as a wife oblige her to hide her feelings for him.

During Jean's convalescence the doctor's son Pieuchon, dies. Jean had passed the last days with him and

⁸Ibid., pp. 111-112.

when he is buried, Jean has his first relapse. A few months later he dies.

The title of the book symbolizes Noémi's renunciation for Jean. She attempts to be as kind as possible to him, trying, with her kisses, to make him forget his repulsiveness. These kisses are compared to those the Saints gave to the leprous in ancient days.

Noémi would now be free to marry the young doctor but her life with Jean has made this impossible. She will now take pride in being faithful to Jean's memory.

In both this book and in *Génitrix*, which was published a year later, we find very similar situations at the end. The father of Jean in the first book and the mother of Fernand in *Génitrix* are brother and sister. The father of the former withdraws into himself after the marriage of his son. Preoccupied with his own illness, imagined or real, he tries to alleviate it by taking narcotics. He turns his attention from his son to his daughter-in-law, the stronger of the two characters, and promises to leave her his fortune, if she will not remarry after the death of his son Jean. Félicité's son Fernand has no physical handicap nor inferiority complex, so that his mother has to exert a great deal more power to dominate him.

Noémi is really the only well balanced, healthy character in Le Baiser au lépreux, and she will doubtless live out a normal existence, although the memory of Jean occupies a more important place in her life than his real presence did. Fernand's wife, in Génitrix, also takes on a new importance in his memory after her death. This situation, nevertheless, is a morbid, neurotic thing; it becomes to be a real obsession.

GÉNITRIX

1923

The dedicatory words which preface this work have already been quoted in the Introduction of this thesis, but may be repeated here for the purpose of emphasis. They are:

"A mon frère le Docteur Pierre Mauriac, je confie ces malades en témoignage de ma tendre admiration."

This work was published in 1923. The word "genitrix" is a Latin word, meaning "the generating force" or "the mother", and it is the woman, a mother, who dominates the whole work. She is Félicité Cazenave, née Péloueyre, a family which figures also in Le Baiser au lépreux. For

her, an unhappy childhood had only led to an unhappy marriage. She had been raised in the country near Bordeaux and married by her family to a man for whom she had no love. When he died, leaving her with a son to raise, she felt no sorrow. Her son Fernand becomes her only reason for living. She dominates him completely, so that there is no possibility for him to escape from her tyranny. She has fostered in him the feeling of total dependence on her, making him believe himself a semi-invalid, and convincing him that without her constant care he would not long survive.

All this is told in retrospect, for when the novel opens, Fernand is a man of about fifty. In a moment of revolt against his mother, who still dominates him, he has married a girl, much younger than himself, and she is on her deathbed as the result of a miscarriage. In the very first chapters she dies, unattended by either the mother or the son during that last night of her life.

It is then that we get acquainted with the background of the personages in this strange drama, for at last all of the pent-up emotions of Fernand against his heartless and domineering mother overflow, and we see what his life has been like during these long years of frustration.

As is frequent in the novels of Mauriac, the action here centers about three persons. It is the study of a psychological conflict, as we can see since the seventeenth century in France in les romans d'analyse.

Félicité, a strange, lonesome, selfish woman, has no interests outside her son. All of his life she has watched every move he has made, being careful to discourage any activities on his part away from the family estate which might bring about an estrangement or separation between him and her. He has had to hide to smoke a cigarette or to eat some morsel which his mother has not considered good for him, and if he has occasionally escaped to Bordeaux to satisfy more secret desires, Félicité keeps herself well informed as to what is going on and knows that the kind of person her son sees there cannot possibly become an important part of his life.

She is not prepared, however, to meet the sudden crisis which develops when Fernand falls in love with the scheming young girl, who serves as governess on the neighboring estate, and who meets Fernand in secret. This girl, Mathilde, is living at the home of her uncle, M. Lachassaigne, and is caring for his feeble-minded daughter. Her mother had run away when Mathilde was a child, leaving Mathilde and a brother. The brother, Jean, a

handsome adolescent, had been spoiled by everyone, had later become involved in a scandal and was forced to flee to one of the colonies. Mathilde, who loved him dearly, had heard nothing of him since. Her father, a one time teacher, had gone insane and she had had to care for him until his death. Now she was living a detested existence, as an unwanted member of her uncle's household, and when she saw Fernand Cazenave, she deliberately set about captivating him. It had been a hasty courtship, ending in marriage, and Félicité's rage as a result of it had been assuaged somewhat when she had received a message from her son on his honeymoon which indicated that this woman could not understand him. Thereafter, Felicite followed, with a sort of fiendish glee, the marriage which she wished to see fail.

Indeed there was little in common between Mathilde and Fernand, and after a very short time they lived as if they were strangers to each other, Mathilde occupying her room at one side of the house, and Fernand moving back into his old room next to that of his mother. Mathilde realizes that she has lost the son to the mother, but she believes that she will recapture him again when the baby is born, that family pride, the conservation of the family name will bring him back to her. But the baby is not born alive.

Mathilde is fatally ill from the miscarriage, and although the doctor has told Félicité of the seriousness of her condition, Mathilde spends the night of her death alone.

Fernand, now seeing what Mathilde might have meant to him, realizing the role his mother has played in their alienation, turns against her and reproaches her for her lack of care of Mathilde. Fernand is seized by a feeling of deep remorse. The memory of Mathilde becomes an obsession for him. He reacts violently against his mother, and there is no reconciliation between them until she suffers a paralytic stroke. Even this does not bring her son back under her domination, although there are moments of tenderness between the two as she approaches her end. Mathilde has become the dominating presence in the house. Then the mother dies. Let us quote from an article by Wallace Fowlie concerning the novel from this point:

. . . Up to this point, Fernand Cazenave had existed in terms of his love and hate for his mother; but now that she has gone he gradually ceases to exist as a human being. During her life she had been the sun goddess, the creator of life, the provider and sustainer. With her extinction Fernand has no longer an orbit in which to revolve. . . Marie de Lados, who represents fidelity to the faith and to the race, a humble counterpart to the matriarch, assumes now the dominant role of humanity in the house. . . She is not the matriarch who creates and strikes down. She is the mother

who reproduces and perpetuates, and she introduces into the Cazenave house, where two women have died and where one man lives in a kind of death, a young boy, Raymond, her grandson. The old servant creates around him the new center of life.⁹

But Marie succeeds in enraging her master and he drives her and her grandson from the house. Then he feels, for a brief time, the crushing solitude of the house until Marie returns, and stands in his door. He calls to her, and total tragedy is probably avoided by that act.

LE FLEUVE DU FEU

1923

"Tout ce qui est au monde, est concupissance de la chair, ou concupissance des yeux, ou orgueil de la vie."

St. Jean (1 Epitre 2, 16)

"Mal heureuse la terre de malédiction qui ces trois fleuves de feu embrasent plutôt qu'ils n'arrosent."

Pascal.

These two quotations preface this novel and have been chosen because they symbolize very accurately what it is about, explaining the title at the same time.

The presentation of the plot follows Mauriac's

⁹Wallace Fowlie, "Mauriac's Dark Hero", The Swanee Review, Vol. 56, 1946, p. 50.

general pattern of bringing about the central problem through some unimportant circumstance.

Daniel Trassis is a young man living in Paris. An uncle had been taking care of him until his death, since he had lost his parents while he was still a child. Now he is working with Raymond Courrèges (*Le Désert de l'amour*)¹⁰ his very enterprising and self-confident friend. This friend has a very balanced personality; his emotions never interfere with his life. Even love is for him "un acte comme un autre". Daniel, on the contrary, is not able to face facts and find a solution in such a positive way.

Annoyed by an old mistress, he leaves Paris for a time and hides himself in a valley in the Pyrénées. He is living alone in a little hotel when Mlle. Plailly arrives. Gisèle, Mlle. Plailly's first name, expects to meet there a good friend of hers, Mme. de Villeron, with the latter's four year old daughter. A delay in her arrival gives Gisèle and Daniel time enough to get acquainted. Daniel is enormously attracted by the idea that she is still pure and without experience and he desires her more every day.

Mme. de Villeron arrives with the child, Marie. Gisèle dedicates her time to them, scarcely seeing anything

¹⁰Mauriac, *Le Désert de l'amour*, Paris: Bernard Grasset, 61, Rue des Saints-Pères, 1925.

of Daniel. He, nevertheless, is too much interested in her to leave the two friends alone. He watches them every possible minute and instinctively feels that Marie is Gisèle's own daughter. Faced with this conclusion, all of his illusions concerning Gisèle collapse. His desire for her, nevertheless, is stronger than any prejudice and so he admires now in her the mother.

He wants to confirm his suspicions and goes to her room where Mme. de Villeron shortly afterwards finds him and upbraids him. A violent discussion takes place between them, after which Daniel is certain that his guesses have been right. Following this scene, Mme. de Villeron decides to leave the place the next morning with Gisèle and Marie.

Daniel takes no step to see Gisèle again but she, on the pretext of leaving him an explanatory letter, goes to his room that night. Her real desire is to see him and have an understanding with him. They spend the night together and part with the agreement to meet again.

Mme. de Villeron is a deeply religious woman and is concerned about the soul of Gisèle. Through what she considers her duty to Gisèle she finds out the truth and wants to prevent further meetings between the two young people. The only solution she knows of is to stay as near

as possible to Gisèle, offering her her guidance and praying for her.

Gisèle had been a woman with strong passions like many an other, who at times had lacked control. She had once given in to a liaison with a young soldier. He had died shortly before Marie was born. To hide this consequence of her love for the soldier, Gisèle had gone to the house of her friend who gladly took care of her and the child after it was born.

The projected future meeting between Daniel and Gisèle never materializes. Daniel does indeed go to Paris to see her and learns that she is at church. He goes there to meet her, but when he sees her devoutly praying, with the temptations of this world and her own desires obviously suppressed, he goes away without talking to her.

The strong passions depicted in this book, while not enjoying the blessings of conventionality, are not unnatural ones and the people concerned are not mentally ill. The author does not judge them, for he never sets himself up as a judge. Strange to say, he leads one to believe that Gisèle may be permitted to conquer her passionate nature, for such is not usually the case with his characters. He does give them free will--in that he differs from his mentor Pascal--but this will does not carry them in the paths of virtue and to a solution of their problems.

LE DÉSERT DE L'AMOUR

1925

When this book opens Raymond Courrèges, a young man of thirty-five, is entering a night club in Paris. He is a good-looking man and in him can easily be recognized the "Don Juan" used to the night life of a big city. Among the people in the club he recognizes the faces of two persons whom he has once known in his native city of Bordeaux. They are Victor Larroussel and Maria Cross, and when he sees the latter a whole train of memories of his younger years come to his mind. He is surprised to feel no more the hatred which she had stirred in him many years ago.

He can see himself as he was eighteen years before, an adolescent living with his parents and his grandmother near Bordeaux. His father was a well-known doctor, the only member of his family for whom he had any real affection. He was a quiet, thoughtful man who loved his children. His daughter, who was much older than Raymond, had been his pride and joy until she had married a man of whom her father did not approve. He had loved Raymond too but was incapable of showing his real feelings for him and of understanding the problems of the youth.

The family had come together only at meal time and

then the conversation was not very cordial, for the father was bored by the discussions of his wife and daughter. There seemed to be no interest common to the whole family. It was at dinner one night that the bells of the nearby church rang, announcing the death of the child of Maria Cross, and Raymond's mother had pronounced this death a visitation of God. What could a woman living as Maria Cross lived expect? She was the mistress of Victor Larroussel, a married man with a son. The fact was well known to everyone because Maria was living in one of the Larroussel properties. M. Courrèges tried to soften the harsh judgment of his wife but did not succeed.

It was he who had attended the child, and only he knew that during that time he had fallen in love with the mother. No wonder that he insisted on attending the funeral of the child, for all his thoughts had become centered on its mother. However, from all appearances they were no more than good friends, and even Maria did not realize what his feelings for her were, for he had never found the right minute to speak to her of them, and her own feelings for him were largely those of admiration for his skill as a doctor.

At that time Raymond had been seventeen years of age. All the problems common to that age were troubling

him and the wildest ideas sometimes inhabited his brain. First he had decided to escape from home but as he was still afraid to face the world he decided to remain with his family. The possibility of suicide was another idea which came to him, but school started again and he was occupied for a time with his studies, so that finally the difficult period passed and he was no longer the center of the remarks and worries of his family. It was his father now with whom everyone was preoccupied, for he was ill.

Ever since the death of the child, the love of Paul Courrèges for Maria had grown stronger but she showed him nothing but friendship, and even this friendship was totally disinterested. The situation had made him ill and had brought on a nervous breakdown.

Meantime Raymond had met Maria, not knowing at first who ~~she was~~. They had ridden daily on the same street car, he coming from his classes and she returning from the cemetery, where she visited the tomb of her child. Raymond soon felt a great attraction for Maria, although she was much older than he, for at this time he was eighteen and she twenty-seven. Raymond knows the reputation of this woman and in his torment over his feelings for her he goes to his father and they have a long conversation about Maria. Raymond condemns her and his father defends her.

Finally Raymond goes to see Maria, but they are scarcely at ease with each other and cannot talk about those things which are occupying each of their minds. Then Raymond makes a second visit, determined to tell Maria what his feelings for her are, how much he admires her, and Maria, admitting to herself the foolishness of her own feelings, knows that she has been looking forward to this return. Nevertheless, Raymond's advances, once they are made, are violently rejected. This rejection, a bitter disappointment and frustration of his desires, is the beginning of his life as a "Don Juan" for he must now prove to himself that he can seduce any woman he desires. However, after this experience he admits to his father that he has been wrong in his judgment of Maria.

That same night Maria had had an accident. She had fallen from a window of her home. Although he was ill and in bed, Dr. Courrèges had gotten up and had gone to attend her. She was not in danger but he had remained with her the whole night.

Years pass. Raymond is now living in Paris. He has not seen his father for five years because of a misunderstanding with him. On the evening when he is visiting the night club he has just received a letter from his father, announcing that he is coming to Paris. Victor Larroussel invites Raymond to his and Maria's table and

and for a time during the evening he leaves Raymond alone with Maria. Raymond still feels attracted to Maria but she is completely indifferent to him, and tells him that when Victor had become a widower several years before they had married.

As a result of a stroke which Victor Larroussel suffers from drinking too much, all the important persons in the novel are again brought together, including Dr. Courrèges who, since he is in Paris, is called in to care for Victor. The latter feels the same love for Maria which he had known years before. Raymond, with a long series of conquests behind him, must admit to himself that he has never been able to seriously attract Maria. And so the story ends.

The critics consider this one of Mauriac's finest novels. As the title suggests, it deals truly with "Le Desert de l'amour", for although there is love, probably true love, from several quarters, it is never reciprocated and all of these people live in a solitude through which they cannot seem to break. Victor can scarcely be considered to love this woman who has been his mistress and is now his wife. Father and son are in love with the same woman, the mistress and later the wife of another. In different ways she refuses them both. Father and son,

in spite of their respect and affection for each other, remain strangers all of their lives. Maria seems not to change throughout the novel. A strange indifference characterizes her, and she seems incapable of any deep emotion.

Religion plays no part in this book, nor does there appear to be any conflict within the characters between those things which we are accustomed to consider as right and wrong. Only Raymond's mother had censured Maria for her way of life, and she had not intimately known her. Raymond, although he had suspected his father's feelings for Maria at the end of his own early attraction for her, had never felt that his father was anything more than the most moral of men.

Compared with the personages in most of Mauriac's works these are remarkably sane. Raymond, as a very young man, suffers a period of frustration, it is true, but he succeeds in overcoming this, if only through a life of dissipation in Paris. His father, a man of a deep and introspective nature, comes the nearest to being mentally ill. He does suffer a nervous breakdown because of his disappointment that his feelings for Maria are not reciprocated, but his approach to this problem is anything but an aggressive one, and the melancholia resulting seems to

be rather a continuation of a condition, aggravated to be sure, which is common to his nature and which is not improved by marriage to a woman with whom he has nothing in common.

THÉRÈSE DESQUEYROUX

1927

Thérèse Desqueyroux is a character that interested Mauriac very much. After writing this book about Thérèse, Mauriac wrote three others in which she is the main character.

In the short preface to this novel, the author tells us that he has known her. He has seen traits of her in a young woman in a Court House, in another who lives in Bordeaux with her family and an indifferent husband. He has seen a woman with a high and beautiful forehead, sad and evil eyes, like those which characterize Thérèse.

When the novel opens, Thérèse is leaving the Court House. She has been on trial for poisoning her husband and declared innocent. She walks across the little town accompanied by her father, M. Larroque and the lawyer. Thérèse now has to go home to Argelouse where her convalescent husband is waiting for her. Her father bids her

goodby at the railroad station, reminding her that her life has to go on as it was before. No changes are allowed because they would be revealing.

Once in the train, Thérèse thinks about what she can expect from life from now on. At home are her husband and her little girl Marie. After the horrible discovery of her act, her husband, Bernard Desqueyroux and she had had the common interest of building up her declaration and defense for the trial in order to protect their families and their names from scandal. Now, the problem solved, what can Bernard and Thérèse talk about? The idea and the hope come to her mind that perhaps she could explain everything to Bernard and he, understanding her, could forgive her. She tries to discover the reason for the beginning of the idea to poison her husband. To understand that, it is necessary for her to go back many years in her life, to that time when she still was an adolescent and attended High School.

She was living then with her father, her mother having died when she was born. Her father was a senator and therefore quite an important person. In those days her best girl friend had been Anne de la Trave. This girl went to a different school from that of Thérèse, a fact

that still increased their differences. Thérèse was an inquisitive, restless character in contrast to her rather naive friend. They were neighbors in Argelouse, a place where they spent their vacations every year.

Bernard Desqueyroux was the half-brother of Anne de la Trave and some day Thérèse would marry him. That had been decided by the two families long ago. Bernard was a quiet, well balanced individual. He had no other problems than those concerning himself or his immediate activities. Thérèse did not love him really. She realized the fact that among those men she could have chosen, Bernard was by far the best. The fact which made him more lovable to her was his being the brother of Anne.

After their marriage when they went on their honeymoon Thérèse already began to be repulsed by him. When they returned, the young couple went to live with the family de la Trave.

In the meantime Anne has fallen in love for the first time in her life. The boy she has fallen in love with is the young Azevedo, a peasant believed to have tuberculosis. The family is opposed to the friendship and love of the two, and it is hoped that Thérèse's good influence on Anne will bring about a change in her feelings.

Anne who cannot go and see Jean Azevedo is suffering terribly. The family decides then to take a trip with her to Biarritz, to make her forget her unhappy love. Anne only agrees to this project after Thérèse promises to go to talk to Jean after her departure.

Thérèse moves to Argelouse into that big, old country house in which a deaf old sister of her mother is living. Being near Jean now, she goes one day to visit him and to talk with him about Anne. To her great surprise she finds out that Jean had liked Anne but never had loved her or thought about marrying her. Thérèse and Jean Azevedo, having the same intellectual problems and anxieties, become very good friends. Thérèse together with him, writes a letter to Anne telling her the truth about Jean's feeling. Two months later, Jean leaves for Paris, where he is going to study.

Anne, desperate over the idea of losing Jean forever, escapes from Biarritz but arrives too late in Argelouse; Jean has already left.

It had been during that summer that Bernard had been afraid of a heart attack. When he went to the doctor he was found to be anemic and the prescription is to take a few drops of arsenic daily.

It happens that a short time later, a big fire in the neighboring pine woods threatens Bernard and in his excitement he takes the double dose of arsenic drops. Thérèse sees this but does not prevent his drinking them. As a result he is sick for several days. This is the beginning of her idea to poison him.

When a child is born, the couple moves back to the house of the de la Trave family, and it is then, that Thérèse begins to dislike her husband more every day. She starts to give him more and more arsenic. The doctors can not find the reason for Bernard's sickness, until one day, when paralysis of the limbs has begun, the family consults another doctor. Bernard is taken to a hospital and cured there.

When Thérèse arrives at this point of her memories, the train has stopped in Argelouse and she only has time to ask herself if her husband will be able to understand her. Will he even listen to her? When she sees him a few minutes later she knows that in her imagination she has distorted the real Bernard, according to her wishes.

At home not a word of the long prepared confession escapes her lips. She has to listen to the decisions taken by Bernard and his family. The couple is going to

move to the house of the Desqueyroux family. There, Thérèse will live in her room without being allowed to be seen any place else around the house. She is free to walk through the forest and the country. On Sundays, she and Bernard will go to church together and once a week to visit her father, as they did in other times. Marie, Thérèse's little daughter, is going to be sent away. According to Bernard she will be Thérèse's next victim. He cannot find a reason for her act and so has arrived at the conclusion that Thérèse acted impulsively through a desire to be the owner of all the pine woods. Thérèse's disgust for Bernard creeps up again when she hears his judgment and she thinks that among all the reasons he could have found, he has chosen the poorest.

. . . Non, non: elle avait obéi à une profonde loi, à une loi inexorable; elle n'avait pas détruit cette famille, c'était elle qui serait donc détruite; ils avaient raison de la considérer comme un monstre, mais elle aussi les jugeait monstrueux. . . ¹¹

With the idea of predestination, the author tries to excuse Therese's act, as reflected in this quotation.

That night, being left alone, Thérèse feels as if she

¹¹Mauriac, Thérèse Desqueyroux, Paris (14): J. Ferenczi et Fils Editeurs. 9, Rue Antoin-Chantin. Illustrations de Claude Escholier, 1927, p. 95.

can not live any more. Her existence is going to be as though she had been buried alive. She conceives the idea of suicide but is prevented from the realization of that project by the sudden death of her aunt.

A couple of months later, Thérèse is allowed to return alone to Argelouse. Her husband will say that she is neurasthenic and prefers to live by herself. There begins a horrible time for Thérèse, which is the complete solitude in which she has to live. In her dreams one can see her anxiety to talk about her thoughts and her acts, or perhaps to write about them. She withdraws completely from reality and unconsciously tries to kill herself. She becomes so weak that she has to stay in bed, where she passes her days smoking and thinking about herself.

The announcement of the arrival of her husband gives her new life. Bernard comes with his sister Anne and the young Dagenhelm who is engaged to her. Before marrying her, nevertheless, the boy wants to meet Thérèse and confirm what, what has been said about her, is only false rumors.

Thérèse is smart enough to be successful in this point and when the three leave, Bernard gives his consent for her to move to Paris.

L. Le Sage has said about Thérèse: "She is a study of psychoneurosis, which ends up in paranoia in an advanced degree." It is true what she herself has said: "Elle n'avait pas détruit cette famille, c'était elle qui serait donc détruite." The fact that she recognizes in this book that she poisoned her own life, does not help her to fight against her feeling of guilt, which in La Fin de la nuit,¹² reaches the proportions of a terrible persecution complex.

Perhaps one of the problems she would have needed to solve, was to find the real cause of her action. She asks herself, "Où est le commencement de nos actes? Notre destin, quand nous voulons l'isoler, ressemble a ces plantes qu'il est impossible d'arracher avec toutes leur racines."¹³ She probably never would have reached the point of such a mental disorder as we can see in La Fin de la nuit had she not been completely abandoned by her husband. Even in the moment when she returns from the trial, her need for affection is shown in her fantasies. Her husband can not condemn her. With this idea in mind she

¹²Mauriac, La Fin de la nuit. Revue des Deux Mondes. 24:1-43, 1 Nov. 1934, 24:241-84 15 Nov. 1934, 24:481-512 1 Dec. 1934.

¹³Mauriac, Thérèse Desqueyroux, p. 21.

thinks over a whole confession, at the end of which she imagines: "Oui, sa confession finie, Bernard la relèverait: 'Va en paix, Thérèse, ne t'enquies plus. Dans cette maison d'Argelouse, nous attendrons ensemble la mort, sans que nous puissent jamais séparer les choses accomplies.'"14

DESTINS

1928

Jean Gornac, the owner of the large property near Bordeaux called "Viridia", is an old man, who loves his land above everything. He has lost both his wife and his two sons, but the older of his sons has left a wife, Elizabeth, and a son, Pierre. Elizabeth, now a woman of forty-eight, lives in the country with her father-in-law, and a common interest in the country makes their relations very agreeable.

Elizabeth had known no real happiness with her strange and neurasthenic husband, for he had been completely withdrawn into himself, was disinterested in the happenings of things around him and spent most of his time reading.

14Mauriac, Thérèse Desqueyroux, p. 21.

He had married Elizabeth only to meet his physical needs, and it was thus that he maintained at least one connection with reality. He had taken finally to drink, and had had one day, while under the influence of alcohol, an accident which had brought about his death. Elizabeth did not grieve over his death for she had felt no love for him.

Marie Lavage, a servant for many years of Jean Gornac, has a son, Augustin who is intelligent and who has succeeded, through his own efforts for the most part, in making a worthwhile place for himself in Paris. Although he is intelligent, he has worked hard, and cannot understand his son Robert, a handsome youth of twenty-three, who has enough ambition but little will-power, and no intention to work, as his father has done, in order to succeed. He is of an esthetic nature and he turns to interior decorating as a profession. In the rich Parisian homes which he decorates he meets people of an entirely different social level from that of his own. They admire his youth and freshness and he makes friends among them.

Suddenly the life and prospects of this youth change. He becomes ill and must go to Viridis to convalesce. There he first comes to know more intimately the middle-aged Elizabeth, and he awakens in her a passion

which she has never before known.

With her consent, Paule Sesque, a girl friend of Bob, comes to visit him over a week-end. The two young people have a wonderful time together, but it is a difficult day for Elizabeth. On the one hand she feels remorseful for having agreed to Paule's visit, and on the other she is jealous of the happiness of these two people together.

Elizabeth's son, Pierre, several years younger than Bob, arrives home the same week-end from his school in Bordeaux. He is a difficult youth, having inherited some of the unfortunate traits of his father. He is physically unattractive and suffers from a feeling of inferiority. He is narrow-minded in his judgment of others, and of a very religious nature. When he sees Paule and Bob together he is jealous of their happiness and sets about to destroy their love for each other. The amiable Bob has ever been a thorn in his flesh and Pierre reveals to Paule many things about his intimate life in Paris, which cause her to decide to leave Viridis and not to see Bob again until she knows more about him. This causes a quarrel between the two youths. Two weeks pass during which time Bob has no news from Paule, and he leaves Viridis with some friends who come there to visit him.

Elizabeth has been greatly troubled by all of this, disapproving of the attitude of her son, whose intentions have not escaped her. She tried to prevent Bob's departure. However, when he is gone she feels some relief. This relief is of short duration for the next day Paule arrives again on the scene, realizing that she has done Bob a great wrong and that she cannot live without him. However, no one knows where he is and two days later news of an accident in which he was involved and of his death reaches Viridis. Elizabeth is greatly affected by this news. She realizes now that she might have prevented his death by telling him of Paule's intention to leave following her conversation with Pierre. And she had permitted Paule to go because of her own attachment for Bob.

Pierre's first reaction to this news is also one of guilt. The idea that the soul of Bob might be eternally lost through something which he could have prevented weighs on his mind. When he later learns that Bob had died with a priest at his side he is greatly relieved and even happy. There is something in his nature, however, which causes him to enjoy the suffering of others and he sends for Paule to attend the funeral of Bob.

Shortly afterwards Pierre determines to enter a convent. He believes that his mother will be hurt by this

step but he is mistaken. She has suffered too much from conflicting emotions and has lost interest in life and those around her. Pierre's decision is not told to the dying grandfather, Jean Goraac, for, although he had never had anything in common with this grandson, still he had thought that his property would remain in the family and that Pierre would carry on the family name.

It is Pierre who is the principal "malade" in this novel. He is, however, the son of a "malade". He is a repulsive person and his piety only serves to accentuate his disagreeable nature. He is jealous and envious of Bob, although the latter has none of the material security which Pierre might have enjoyed. He cannot get along with his grandfather because the latter is not himself a religious man. He makes himself believe that it is his Catholic duty to give advice to those who need it and it is thus that he excuses his interference in the affairs of Bob and Paule. For a moment after the flight of Paule he had had some question as to the wisdom of his move, but this lasted for only a brief time. Again after Bob's death he had felt some remorse, but when he learned that Bob was attended by a priest at his death, he is relieved and feels no sorrow over his passing.

It is not difficult to explain his withdrawal into a convent. He has no friends, is of a critical nature and feels himself estranged from the world. Perhaps too he realizes that he carries within himself the maladjustments which had made his father an unhappy man, and had carried him to an early grave.

TROIS RÉCITS

1929

Coup de couteau

Under this title, Trois Récits, Mauriac has grouped three short stories, written and published in magazines and then published together in one volume in 1929.

The first of these stories, Coup de couteau, deals with the problems of a married couple and with love.

Louis is an artist. One night he abruptly confesses to his wife his love for one of his students named André. He had known her for a long time without paying any particular attention to her. Suddenly he has found that he is deeply in love with her, although he sees nothing unusual in her.

Louis is tormented by the possibility that he may not be able to consummate his love for André, for he does

not know that she too has loved him for many years. She is a young married woman who lives near Paris and comes into the city only for her lessons.

Louis is assailed by all sorts of doubts and fears. Does Andre only love the artist in him? Is her deference to him due only to a feeling of gratitude for what he has done for her? There are days when he is tormented by every word that she speaks. All of this he confesses to his wife in a momentary period of crisis brought on by the fact that André has not shown up for her lessons for several times. He forgets to whom he is talking, feeling only the necessity to express his anxiety to someone. When his wife asks him if he has ever felt for her what he now feels for André, he tells her frankly that he never has. Strangely enough he does not realize how deeply he has hurt her by showing her that for him she has lost all her attraction.

Then suddenly Elizabeth remembers something that had happened to her a few years earlier. She had taken a wonderful trip during which she was very much attracted to a man of her acquaintance. This man loved and desired her and she had been tempted to give in to his intreaties. Therefore she knew herself still attractive to someone, if not to her husband.

Dawn comes and with it comes a lessening of the

gravity of the problems which this new love of Louis presents to his wife. Elizabeth has her duties as a wife and as the mother of Louis' children. Louis feels ashamed of his revelation of the night before and tries to erase the terrible impression he has left on his wife, but for himself his preoccupation with this other woman is as strong as ever.

Is this unfortunate situation brought about by a sick brain, or is it something that might conceivably happen to anyone? And if it might, does it usually do so?

At any rate Louis is suffering from an obsession, and one which has been in the process of forming for some time. Surely there is something strange about his revealing all of this matter to his wife, apparently for no reason at all as far as she is concerned. But then the artist does not fit into the pattern of ordinary people, and perhaps it is too much for us to expect that he should do so.

The author has the following to say about this story:

Ces traits donneront à penser que Coup de couteau est l'étude d'un cas morbide; or, je doute d'avoir jamais inventé de personnages plus humains, plus ordinaires. Je ne crois pas qu'ils disent et fassent rien qui ne ressemble à ce que disent et font la plupart des êtres en proie à l'amour. Ne m'amuse-je, ici, à réduire en formules simplifiées et forcées à dessein le mal dont souffre mon héros, qui peut-être n'y

souscrirait pas? Mais ces formules, je demeure assuré qu'elles ne paraîtraient en rien excessive aux 'êtres aimés' (ce sont toujours les mêmes) obséder pas les supplications contradictoires de la créature qu'ils font souffrir. Leur prétendue cruauté se ramène presque toujours au sentiment de leur impuissance pour assouvir toutes ces faims, pour étancher toutes ces soifs d'un être tourné vers eux. Ils savent que leur absence fait mal, mais ils savent aussi que leur présence est une torture.¹⁵

Un Homme de lettres

A young man is sitting in Gabriella's apartment.

Gabriella is a woman from one of the provinces who, fifteen years earlier, due the opposition of her parents had refused to marry her lover, Jérôme, but had followed him to Paris where she had lived with him until he abandoned her.

The young man is a friend of hers and will, with his visit, give her an opportunity to reveal her grief. He is, at the moment, considering what advice he can possibly give her. Should he encourage her to talk; try to change the subject; or suggest to her the idea of forgetting and of seeking new interests? How can she forget what she does not want to forget? After so many years she has lost her-

¹⁵Mauriac, "Mes Personnages", Les Annales, Vol. 1, 1929.

self by trying to become what she believed Jerome wanted her to be.

All his considerations are useless because Gabriella does not want to complain. She needs, however, the opinion of her friend, to help her solve her problem. How was it possible for Jérôme, an artist, to abandon her and to wish to marry another woman, the mother of two children? Gabriella believes she knows Jérôme well enough to recognize that he is making a bad move.

She herself has sacrificed her desires for children, because they would have bothered Jérôme. For many years she has suffered his bad tempers, his changing moods, his unexplained absences, in spite of her every wish to please him. She preferred all that to the idea of losing him. His will, his likes and dislikes were the laws she followed all that time.

Gabriella wonders what power this other woman may have over him, knowing that it is not love. Otherwise he would not come some evenings to visit her.

Jérôme comes that very evening, when Gabriella and the young nameless friend of hers are together. He is drunk and very excited. He is angry because, in that condition, he does not dare to go home, the home of his future wife. For a good while he talks of himself, com-

paring the life he has had with Gabriella, to the one he is going to have now. The life and problems of a big family seem to him a much better inspiration than the boring surrounding he lived in before. Gabriella had done everything to please him and to stimulate the artist in him, whereas from now on he would be only a member of a family and certainly not the most important one. After this monologue, Jerome had left as suddenly as he had come, taking with him Gabriella's friend.

On the street he continues to praise his future prospects, arguing that not having a real refuge and abandoned to one's self, one is weak enough to fall in the arms of the church, which he repudiates. He talks about a hundred other things; about his need to write; his need to roam through the streets of Paris at night, simply watching people. He talks about his nights of dreams in some luxurious hotel where he always awakens, astonished by reality. He says that those have been the moments when he has loved Gabriella the most, and proposed to himself, to make her happy. Nevertheless, upon taking leave of his companion, he murmurs, "Je vous la donne. . ."

It is impossible for the young man to get a clear picture out of this torrent of words, among which he can

distinguish none which embodied a sincerity of feeling.

A short time later the young man receives a letter from Gabriella in which she thanks him for the favorable change he had brought about in Jérôme, and invites him for the next night. He goes and again meets Jérôme. The two men go out for dinner and it is then that Jerome explains how he came to change his mind. He says that when they had parted the other night he realized that he had already lost his desire for the new life which he had so highly praised.

He explains that he once really loved Berthe, the woman he was going to marry, but that now, as his passion has died, he is taking his revenge, using her for a case study.

Finally he admits that everybody needs a place where he can go, knowing that he is expected, and where he can be natural; where one knows and understands his good and bad aspects. In this way, Jérôme returns to Gabriella, in spite of the fact that he recognizes that he hurts her too often. This is inherent in love: we hurt and make the loved one suffer when he or she is near but our anxiety is unlimited if we are separated.

Again we feel in this story that we are dealing with

a man who was not able to adjust himself to life in all its aspects.¹⁶ On the other hand one has only to look back into French history to see the position which the "other woman" has occupied. Is there an insatiable desire on the part of the male of this race to enjoy the flattery of numerous conquests? Or is this situation, so frequently encountered, limited to a small element of this, or any other, race?

Le Démon de la connaissance

It is recreation time at school. Two friends, Lange and Maryan are talking together and are not interested in participating in the general activities. About what are they talking? This is the question M. Guillot asked himself many times, without finding an answer. As they are very pious, taking communion every Sunday, there should be no danger.

Maryan is not an attractive boy. On the contrary, with his many nervous tics, he is physically rather ugly. He is a passionate adolescent, with a certain lack of emotional control, subject to sudden and unexpected reactions.

¹⁶He remained an adolescent in many of them.

Being an intelligent child, he has seen himself excluded often from class, due to his conduct. The two main interests in his life are books and music.

He is telling his friend now about his decision to enter a seminar to dedicate his life to study. Social life repels him because of his tremendous inferiority complex. He knows already that his faith is going to be very different from that of his superiors, but he wants to pursue an ideal, to contribute to the spread of new ideas.

They then talk about Mona. She is the wife of Maryan's older brother Robert. His parents had opposed their marriage because of the inferior social position of Mona's family. She had been sick and after many operations is now living in the country house of the family, where Robert goes over the week-ends. Meantime, Maryan has secretly fallen in love with her.

Maryan's family is not especially opposed to the step their unfortunate son determines to take and he enters the seminar. Time passes and one day Lange goes to visit his friend there. Something strikes him immediately. Maryan, who never has been outstanding, has acquired a new authority. His cell is small, damp and dirty, strewn with books and papers, but Maryan is so busy that he has no

time to see all that. He is working very hard; reading, studying, writing. Christ is his only support and passion in this new life. Lange realizes also the immense difference between that boy and all the others of the same age. Maryan did not know that his inferiority feelings were the motivating cause for his withdrawal from society.

A short time after this visit, Lange receives a letter in which Maryan tells him that he has been dismissed from the seminar because of his ideas. He has refused to accept certain beliefs the Church teaches; he wants to prove them, which is contrary to the stipulations of the Catholic religion. The idea of leaving makes him very unhappy because he does not know where to find another refuge. For the first time he is conscious of peace of the seminar life. He had disliked their negative aspects but admires, nevertheless, the community life. At the end of the letter Maryan suggests to his friend that they spend the week-end together in the country house of his parents where Mona, his brother's wife, is also staying.

It is raining when the two boys arrive at Terrefort. Lange is depressed. The disillusionment of his friend contributes to Maryan's growing feeling of insecurity, which reaches its height in Mona's presence. His behavior seems strange. He talks a great deal, suddenly decides to

play the piano and ends by going to walk into the rain. This is as good an escape as any other and it does not bother him that his friend refuses to go with him.

Left alone, Lange and Mona naturally start talking about Maryan. Both admit that he is very intelligent and that he has a special musical talent but consider that he is physically too repulsive to adjust himself happily to the world. Mona is glad to talk with Lange. She starts telling him many intimate things. Unfortunately, Maryan comes home just in time to hear her revealing the fact that he had kissed her once when he believed her asleep.

All three of them pass an unsatisfactory day. At night when the two boys are finally left alone, Maryan feels the necessity to reconcile the differences that had come up between him and Lange. He does not succeed, and in the end there is a violent discussion. Maryan talks about his feeling of inferiority and admits that no one loves him. Many of the people around him, he says, are against him only because they are inferior to him and not able to understand him. He is also disappointed to see that Lange is so different from what he had believed him to be. Lange leaves the next morning.

Maryan feels completely lost in this world. He does not even believe in God any more. He goes to church and a

sudden desire of death overcomes him. He climbs up the tower and the idea of death does not frighten him because there is nothing left in this world he could hold on to. At the last minute, nevertheless, the image of Christ comes to his mind and saves him.

In this book we have an intelligent but neurotic child. His condition is brought on mainly by his physical defects and a lack of affection found at his home.

. . . Il ne déplut pas aux Maryan de jeter ce fils disgracié au fond d'un sac noir, au fond d'une soutane, comme un chiot sans race qu'il vaudrait mieux noyer. . .¹⁷

Maryan does not realize that his flight into the convent is an escape from reality and his love for study and reading is a compensation for physical needs typical in a person of his age.

A rather unique case in Mauriac's novels, is the search for truth as it appears in this short-story. Maryan does not want to believe what the Church teaches. He feels the need to reach that truth by himself. No conflict is brought about by the contradictory facts of his studies and his beliefs as a child. As a rule in Mauriac's other books,

¹⁷Mauriac, Trois Récits, p.

Religion and Dogma are never questioned by his characters.

CE QUI ÉTAIT PERDU

1930

"Ce qui était perdu" is love. This is the idea that can be found all through the novel. Furthermore, Mauriac's main characters say this very clearly. Speaking of the abandoned mistress of Marcel Revaux, the author says:

. . . Ceux qui ont connu l'amour, rien ne les console de l'avoir perdu: Hypocrite je feins de croire que nous sommes au monde pour comprendre, nous qui sommes faites pour aimer. . .¹⁸

Tota Revaux, talking with her brother about her husband, says:

. . . Quel nigaud tu fais. Crois-tu si je l'aimais, toutes ces miseres suffiraient à me détourner de lui? Si je l'aimais, tout cela me plairait au lieu de me faire horreur. . .¹⁹

A few minutes before Irène commits suicide her thoughts are expressed in the following words:

. . . Elle croyait qu'on peut vivre en aimant et sans être aimé; et que le

¹⁸Mauriac. Ce qui était perdu, p. 138.

patient amour finit par recréer, par
 modeler selon ses vues, l'être dont
 il fait ses complaisances.²⁰

Irène Blénaugue is the wife of Hervé. They have been married for many years and their union has been a complete failure. Irène, a very intelligent and kind woman, loved her husband when she married him, and still loves him. Unfortunately she is sick and probably cannot be cured, because the doctors are not able to diagnose precisely her trouble.

Hervé Blénaugue is the most despicable character one can imagine. He hates his wife and since she is sick he secretly desires her death. He is conscious of those feelings and does not repress them. Hervé does not work but lives a life of pleasure with people unknown to his wife and to the reader.

Irène does not believe in God. She wants to be strong enough always to solve her problems alone. More than her sickness or anything else, she suffers from her husband's indifference towards her. To alleviate her sufferings she starts taking a drug and ends by committing

²⁰Ibid., p. 170.

suicide. Feeling particularly ill, she had asked Herve to stay with her over the week-end, which he had promised to do. Nevertheless when Irène falls asleep, he leaves her alone and she dies during his absence. When the next day Hervé is faced with her death, he does not even consider that his neglect is responsible. This happening is only the fulfillment of his desires. Looking at her, he can think of nothing but the pleasures he is going to miss the next days during the burial and of the decisions that now have to be made.

An interesting character is Hervé's mother. She is a very devout Catholic woman who had liked Irène, her daughter-in-law, in her own way. Irène did not like or understand her, and ridiculed her subservience to the Church.

The other two characters of importance are Tota Forcas and Marcel Revaux. Tota is from the south of France, la Gironde, where she lived in the country with her family. This is indeed a strange family. Her father is cruel to his wife and children. We are led to strongly suspect his relationship with one of his sisters. Tota and Alain, his two children, are very attached to each other.

Alain, the brother, is nineteen and Tota a year younger. Suddenly one day Alain realizes that he is in love with his sister. He is frightened at his own feelings

and he urges her to marry a little-known suitor who is much older than she. He does not take into consideration her feelings nor the fact that Marcel Revaux, the suitor, is so much elder than she. It seems to him the best solution as a defense against himself.

The result of this marriage is unfortunate. Tota and Marcel remain strangers to one another. They have nothing in common. They go to live in Paris and Tota likes the life in the big city. Soon she has other men friends and conceives the idea of having a liaison with one of them.

Marcel's life would not have been altered very much if it had not been for a conversation he has with his friend Hervé Blénaugue. Marcel tells him the story of his wife, stressing the attachment between her and her brother, who is about to visit them in Paris. Hervé insinuates that there may be something unnatural in their relation. This idea alone troubled Marcel enormously and the fact that Alain is coming to visit his sister does not help to allay the suspicions. When Marcel finally decides to speak to his wife about it, she reacts violently for the idea had never entered her mind. She is terribly shocked by the accusation in the first moment and the greatest doubts awaken in her.

Marcel had had, before his marriage, a liaison with a very rich woman. When, for a time he had taken to narcotics, he had initiated her into that habit too and she is now in an institution for treatment. She contemplates suicide and the doctors can see no solution for her. A possible remedy is a trip somewhere with Marcel, who agrees to this. They go to the country together and Tota remains alone in Paris.

Tota has her own problems. As has been intimated, she is attracted to a young man of her acquaintance and she is on the verge of an affair with him. Before she takes the final step however, her brother Alain arrives in Paris to communicate to her news of the death of their father. That same day they leave together for their home. Tota is happy that from now on her home is open to her again. She can always find a refuge there now. As long as her father was alive, her home had been a dreadful place.

Alain's thoughts are also travelling fast. He knows that in less than a month he will have abandoned both Tota and the world and will have found security and peace in a convent.

The picture which this book paints is an ugly, morbid one. Three of its characters are addicted to narcotics, or have once been. Two others, the old Forcas and his son

Alain, are the preys of incestuous feelings or relations. The former, a brute of a man, seems not to be ashamed of his past life and has tried to leave his fortune to a sister, who is the mother of an illegitimate child. We are led to suspect that this child is his own. The son, Alain, probably feeling the forces of an evil heredity in his veins and wishing to save himself and another from some evil consequences, has decided to enter a convent.

Perhaps the most maladjusted of all these abnormal characters is the revolting Hervé. With no definite work, of which we are aware, this young man, who has been spoiled by an over-indulgent mother, not only abandons his wife on the night of her worst trial, but spends that time in debauchery, and on the day of her funeral can think of nothing other than the fact he is missing some new pleasure. We never know what his secret pleasures are, but when still alive his wife, Irène, had said of him:

D'ailleurs le siurre, quand il est dans cet état-là, c'est aboutir à quelque pourriture: là où tournent ses pensées, comme là où tournent les corbeaux, on est assuré de découvrir une charogne. Mais les corbeaux ne se trompent jamais, tandis que lui crée souvent cette corruption dont il a faim.²¹

²¹Mauriac, Ce qui était perdu, p. 50.

It should be noted that in this work the author's attention is not directed toward a single individual, nor is it centered on a triangle as is sometimes the case. Here we have a whole world of "malades".

LA FIN DE LA NUIT

1934

The main character of this book is again Thérèse Desqueyroux. Years have passed and she is now living in a small apartment in Paris. A young servant is her only companion and she is greatly attached to her. When this girl, whose name is Anne, has her days off Thérèse is left alone and she suffers terribly from all sorts of fears. One night when she is all alone wondering how she can combat these fears her own daughter arrives.

This daughter, Marie, has been living all these years in Saint-Clair, a small town near Bordeaux, with her father and grandmother. According to an agreement between her father and mother she has been permitted to spend a week every year with her mother. The last three years, however, had gone by without her coming to Paris. On this night she has just fled from home.

She had fallen in love with Georges Filhot, the son of peasants in the neighborhood of her home. His par-

ents had recently made quite a fortune at the same time that the Desqueyroux had lost a great deal. Both families are opposed to a marriage between Marie and Georges, and even Georges is not too sure about his feelings for Marie. He has gone to Paris to study and Marie has followed him there in her fear of losing him.

Therese does not know what to do. She is afraid to keep the girl with her and she does not want her to make some false steps. She decides to tell her about herself and her unhappy existence in the hope that she may think twice before committing a great error. Marie's love for Georges is too strong to be affected by any dread that her mother's story might otherwise have inspired in her.

Finally Thérèse, out of pity for this daughter, who is as strong-headed as herself, offers her all of her own property so that she can marry this man with whom she is in love. She goes herself the next morning to invite Georges to her apartment for dinner, so that she can meet him.

Georges accepts the invitation and spends a pleasant evening with Thérèse and Marie. But Thérèse has not lost her fatal charm and Georges falls in love with her. Thérèse feels herself terribly affected by him. He comes frequently to see her after her daughter has returned to

her father's home. Thérèse tries to show him how wrong he is to love and desire her, a woman old enough to be his mother. She fears to ruin his life as she has ruined that of her own husband and family. She succeeds in driving him away, and then regrets that she has done so.

Georges then writes to Marie and tells her that he no longer cares for her. She returns to Paris in the hope of repairing their love. Thérèse is in despair. She feels herself an evil, sinister thing, which brings unhappiness on everything with which she comes in contact. She fears everyone now, even her faithful servant, Anne.

Marie does not succeed in bringing Georges back to her. Thérèse decides then to return to the relative safety of the country house of the Desqueyroux with her daughter, for people will now have lost their curiosity and suspicion of her and she will no longer try to take up relations of an intimate nature with that family, but will only ask to be allowed to spend out her years there in quiet and peace, hoping not to ruin the lives of any more people.

LES ANGES NOIRS

1936

This book is the last one I am going to consider and perhaps the best one. Although the basic ideas are the same

as those found in many of Mauriac's novels, Les Anges noirs is really the only one that has a plot and presents many characters of importance. It starts with a long prologue in which we are told the life of the central character, Gabriel Gradère. He is confessing his life to a young clergyman, Alain Forcas (Tota's brother).²² Gabriel is the son of an overseer of the property belonging to the Peloueyre family. His mother had died when he was still a child. For this reason he had been placed in a boarding school and having later attracted the attention of a rich woman, been taken care of by her.

He blames part of his misfortune in life on having pleased everyone too much. In his confession he says:

. . . Ce qui a décidé de ma vie a commencé d'argir dès ma petite enfance. Oui, d'aussi loin qu'il me souviennne, je plaisait; ou plus exactement ma figure plaisait et je me servais de ma figure. . .²³

He spent his vacations every year in Liogeats. Mme. du Buch and her sister-in-law are the owners of a property there. Each of these two widows has a daughter. The girls' names are Adila and Mathilde. They became very fond of

²²Mauriac, Ce qui était perdu, p.

²³Mauriac, Les Anges noirs, p. 15.

the young Gradère and dispute for his preference between them. Adila is the older and tries to be his big sister. Mathilde on the contrary being almost his age (twelve years) is his playmate. As the years pass, both cousins fall in love with him. Adila nevertheless believes she has more rights to him because she had done more for him.

It was at that time that Gabriel decides not to become a priest as he had originally planned. His benefactor agrees to his plans to continue his studies in Paris, furnishing him the means to do so. His resources nevertheless are very limited and he is very happy to get monetary help from Adila. As a child she had been very faithful and religious, but she had slowly lost her faith since Gabriel had left the Seminary. Adila goes frequently to visit him and to spend a few days with him. She is not attractive physically but Gabriel continues his relations with her merely to get money from her. She becomes pregnant and to hide this fact from her family, she has to bring about a misunderstanding with her mother and live by herself. Gabriel is not interested in marrying her. Furthermore he has a mistress in Paris, a prostitute named Aline, who later initiates him into the business of blackmail. Finally she makes Gabriel her victim, demanding more and more from him, and as a solution to this situation

he decides to marry Adila. He has lived a horrible life during all those years. It had been the years of the war, and a prosperous period for blackmailers.

In the meantime Mathilde's mother has died and the girl has been sent to a school away from home.

Gabriel, having made up his mind to marry Adila, goes to Liogeats to get married there. Destiny nevertheless complicates the situation again. One day after Gabriel's arrival, Mathilde returns home. She has become extremely attractive. She loves the man Gabriel as she had loved the boy many years ago, and Gabriel dreams for a few hours about a real happy life at the side of this woman. She could not only give him the money he needs, but at the same time her charming personality. Instead he has to marry the older woman Adila who does not even love him any more. He tells Adila the truth about his feelings. She has been a disillusioned woman for many years but her old jealousy reawakens when she considers the possibility of Gabriel marrying Mathilde. She announces her marriage to Mathilde who, a short time after this episode, marries a M. Desbats. He had been the administrator of her property and remained until the end of his days in this position.

As soon as they are married, Adila obeys Gabriel in everything. He obtains all the money he wants from her,

but many times she is obliged to sell land in order to satisfy his demands. After a year, Adila dies.

From then on, the little Andrès is taken care of by Mathilde. She raises him with her daughter Catherine, loving him even more than her own child.

In order to obtain the property belonging to Andrès, the old Desbats decides to marry him to his daughter as soon as they are old enough.

Aline, the prostitute, increases her demands on Gabriel, and the idea of eliminating her from this world again comes to Gabriel's mind. He had first felt the necessity of killing her when he married Adila and had been afraid of Aline's reaction. Gabriel despises and fears her at the same time. She possesses revealing papers, which, if turned over to the police, would easily ruin his life. He despises her also because she has lost all her attractiveness and has given in to drinking. Her last demand of Gabriel is that he blackmail his own son. Gabriel is revolted by the idea, but impelled by fear, he leaves Paris and goes to Liogeats to find some solution. The prologue ends here and from now on the characters gain importance.

In the first place, Mathilde appears again. She is now the owner of Liogeats. She has not found happiness in her marriage and tries to compensate for this in her love

for Andrès and her love of the land. All her thinking revolves around Andres who is now twenty-two years old and will marry Catherine in the near future. Andrès does not have the attractive personality nor the good looks of his father, but in many respects is very similar to him. Mathilde is disappointed and afraid at the same time when she makes this discovery because for many years she has only seen in Andres what she wants him to be.

A young man reappears with his problems. He is the young priest, Alain Forcas, whom we met in Ce qui était perdu, and who had entered the cloister to struggle against the love he felt for his sister Tota. She had also been at Liogeats with her brother. People had gone so far as to say that they were not brother and sister and that it was a shame for a priest to live so openly with a woman. These rumors had obliged Tota to leave. She promised her brother to return to her husband, whom she detests, but before she joins him, she has a liaison with Andres Gradère. She is his first mistress and her influence on him is great. She opens his eyes in many respects and he is desperate when she leaves for Paris.

Symphorien Desbats is a miserly old man who is in ill health. He loves and dominates his daughter Catherine. Her mother, Mathilde, says of her:

. . . Elle est toujours à l'affut. . . ,
 toujours à épier. Son père l'a dressé
 comme Bergère (the dog), ajouta-t-elle
 avec un accent de haine.²⁴

Desbats is willing to have his daughter marry Andrès in order to keep his property in the family. In the meantime, Andres' father, Gabriel, is getting all of his son's money that he can get his hands on in order to satisfy his old mistress, Aline. The old Desbats then wants his daughter Catherine released from her promise to marry Andrès. Gabriel conceives the idea of marrying his son, Andres, to Mathilde after he completes his plan to kill the old Desbats. He horrifies Mathilde and Andrès by distorting their feelings of affection for each other. Until now, Mathilde had felt only mother love for Andrès.

Another event comes to interfere with everything. The old Desbats has learned of the existence of Aline and of her intimate relations, and her blackmailing activities with Gabriel. As he is afraid to be in the house with Gabriel, he gets in touch with Aline, who promises, for a certain sum of money, to take Gabriel back to Paris with her. Mathilde is told these plans and in her desire to protect both father and son from a scandal, she reveals the plans

²⁴Mauriac, Les Anges noirs, p. 91.

to Gabriel. He thinks that the moment has come when he has to do away with Aline. The night of her arrival at Liogeats, he secretly kills her.

Then follows a horrible period of suspicion, remorse, and doubts. Andr  s, as well as the old Desbats and Catherine find out about the murder. The loss of his mistress, the loss of Tamati (Mathilde) because of the revolting suggestion of his father, and finally his father's crime, upset him completely. He needs help in his confusion and loneliness and he turns to Catherine who has been waiting for him for so long. She knows that he can never love her, but she is happy to be allowed to love him.

Je ne t'aime pas, Catherine, dit-il. Je ne pourrai jamais t'aimer comme tu le d  sires. . .
Je le sais, cela ne fais rien, pourvu que je sois l  , que je ve  ille sur toi. . .²⁵

Gabriel struggles against his fears and remorse and finally hides himself in the house of Alain, the priest. He wanted to kill himself, so he walked many nights in the rain, knowing that he was not strong enough to stand such exposure. When he finally goes to confess his sins to the priest, he is already at the point of death. Alain, the priest, by offering his help and understanding to Gabriel,

²⁵Ibid., p. 240.

wins the friendship of the whole family. This was something the priest needed to give him some satisfaction in his solitary and renounced life.

How strongly Mauriac believes in the benevolence of God is shown with great evidence in this book. After a life like that of Gabriel Gradere, God forgives on account of sincere repentance. It is the Catholic view point. The repentance takes place at the moment of death and we do not know, if it really was deep enough to bring about a definite change of life in other circumstances.

. . . Et pourtant Mathilde le savait, il existe une autre force: Adila était sauvé; l'enfant criminel qui l'avait corrompue était déjà plus qu'à demi engagé dans le ciel. Même à Liogeats, l'espérance humaine criait victoire. L'amour avait vaincu, cet amour dont la face véritable se dérobe au monde. . .²⁶

There remains the question of what motivated Gabriel's behavior. As a child he had been spoiled due to many circumstances. He had no mother; the father did not have the means to raise the child, and he had been taken care of by a wealthy family, who liked him particularly because he was a beautiful child. All of this favored the

²⁶Ibid., p. 285.

natural selfish tendency which otherwise would perhaps not develop so strongly.

Like many others of Mauriac's characters, Gabriel possesses one single interest: himself. He does not know what it means to love someone. He never could satisfy his needs of money. As an adolescent he accepted Adila, with that pecuniary idea in mind and without measuring the consequences of his actions. Not a thought did he have for the feelings of the girl, nor her mother to whom he owed so much. His mistress Aline later only accentuates this trend, and when Gabriel marries Adila he is driven by the same incentive. Would he have acted in the same way without Aline's blackmail? Probably so. There would have been something else for which he would have needed money. There is no barrier for him. He robs his son and he would have killed the old Desbats and married his son Andres to Mathilde without a doubt or hesitation, regardless of the fact that he is destroying all those lives.

It is the first time that one of Mauriac's characters succeeds in killing some one. In some of the other novels can be found the desire to kill but only one positive attempt is made and that is by Thérèse Desqueyroux.

Gabriel dies in repentance of the accumulation of the repressed feelings of guilt which break out in a moment of physical weakness.

CONCLUSION

In the sketches made of each novel, studies of the characters who suffered maladjustment and emotional unbalance, have been pointed out for special emphasis. It now remains to try to group them and to indicate the possible causes for their conditions.

The problem of the married couple has shown up several times. Among them are: Dr. Courrèges and his wife, in Le Désert de l'amour; Thérèse and Bernard Desqueyroux, in Thérèse Desqueyroux; Louis and Elizabeth, in Coup de couteau; Jérôme and Gabriella in Un Homme de lettres; Irène and Hervé Blénaugue, and Tota and Marcel Reveaux, in Ce qui était perdu. Many causes may have contributed to this problem. Maybe it is due to a lack of affection in childhood of one of the partners. Not having been loved, there might exist an incapacity to accept love from others. Sexual love may not arise in those matrimonies arranged like business contracts. A parental fixation may interfere, as well as some physical inadequacy.

Then there are those young men who, because of some physical handicap, have developed a tremendous feeling of inferiority. Here can be named Jean Pelouyre, in Le Baiser au lépreux; Paul, in Destins; and Maryan, in Trois Récits.

All of them magnify the fact of their physical repulsiveness. They lacked love and have not been able to compensate for their real defects.

Youth suffers an unsatisfied need for affection and adequacy, and among those the most important are: Jean-Paul Johanet, in L'Enfant chargé de chaînes; Edward Dupont-Gunther, in La Chair et le sang; and Robert Lados, in Destins. The main problem encountered by all of them is that they could not satisfy their need of self-realization. Edward, because he never achieved anything in his life, and desiring peace and repose, goes as far as to commit suicide.

In some of the novels it is of interest to note the fixation between parents and sons. As good examples can be mentioned M. Pélouyre and his son Jean, in Le Baiser au lépreux; Félicité Cazanave and her son Fernand, in Génitrix. We find an analogous situation between Gisèle Flailly and her friend Mme. de Villeron, in Le Fleuve du feu, here the latter takes for Gisèle the place of the mother.

Separately may be named the old Foracas in Ce qui était perdu; who had incestuous relations with his sister, a fact which is of importance only so far as his son suffers and represses the same desires in relation to his own sister.

This grouping of characters has been done taking in

account the most outstanding symptoms encountered and it should not be taken too dogmatically.

To determine whether an individual has made a normal adjustment, one must consider him in relation to his cultural environment, his age, his sex and his personality. Furthermore, his childhood must be looked into. It is during that time, that the direction of the individual drives are learned, and these are going to be the basic pattern for the behavior of the individual. Cause for emotional unbalance and neurotic behavior can also be found in childhood.

The early years of Mauriac's characters are not described adequately. He usually takes them up at the age of twenty and gives only a few retrospective dates and facts which are necessary to build up the crises he presents in his novels. Ever recurring facts are: a lack of maternal affection and understanding due to the circumstance that the mother dies when the children are very young. In other cases the mother has left the family and her husband, to live with another man. The fathers were usually strict and lack understanding of juvenile problems. This may help us comprehend how many of the boys did not find satisfaction for their need of affection, and often times had an infantile fixation.

Many important factors determine the nature of the individual. One of these is heredity. Mauriac considers inheritance from our immediate parents of minor importance. We are the result of our ancestors, of all the tendencies we bring with us at birth. Mauriac uses these considerations to explain the secret forces that move us to act even against our own welfare. This thought can often be seen in his novels. In Les Anges noirs Gabriel Gradère says in his confession to the priest:

. . . Nous sentons tellement que cette puissance pour avalir dépasse les forces de l'individu misérable et que pour être entraîné a ce rythme il faut une vitesse acquise et accrue de génération en génération. Que de morts s'assouvissent en nous et par nous! Que de passions ancestrales se délivrent! Pour ce geste que nous hésitions a faire, combien sont-ils a nous pousser la main? . . .¹

The above quotation brings out in the writer's opinion that the author under consideration does not indulge in systematic psychology i. e. determination of cause, prognosis of therapy.

After taking into account the influence of the heredity, considerations of the importance of environment remains. In general the background for Mauriac's personages

¹Mauriac, Les Anges noirs, p. 14.

is much the same. The economical situation is solved. Not once does the monetary problem present itself. Usually his people come from families who have been well-to-do land-owners for generations. The social relations are very limited and nothing is known about their professions or the work in which they engage. Mauriac considers that the pre-occupation of the mind begins where the worriness over earning our daily bread leaves off. He forgets the fact that the personality of each individual represents a unit and if some maladjustment or neurotic condition is to be found there, the whole behavior of the individual will be influenced. For the study of the characters it would be interesting to know to what degree their neurotic conditions have affected their social conduct. Work would be at the same time an occupational therapy for many of these characters. Friendly relationships are lacking and there is frequently an atmosphere of hypocrisy, like that in which Mauriac has been raised. No one is interested in his neighbor, although he may be very much interested in his neighbor's property and how to acquire it. Also little is known about the intellectual interests of the characters. They do not seem to have had very many, and maybe it is the time in which the action takes place, the first twenty-five years of the century, that is relevant to this fact.

One remarks the clear distinction which exists between love and sex. The emotional element is absent. There remains the physical, which often motivates feelings of guilt and seldom gives complete satisfaction. In the preface to Trois Récits, Mauriac has said:

. . . L'union charnelle satisfait un instant ce vœu contradictoire de solitude et de la présence, de dualité et d'unité; mais l'antique tristesse de l'homme et de la femme lorsqu'ils se séparent, aussi loin qu'ils soient descendu dans le plaisir, témoigne d'une déception, d'un désaccord, tels que chacun se réfugie et s'abîme dans son propre épuisement. . .²

The religious factor can be looked upon from different angles. The outcome of his novels show that some characters withdraw completely, searching refuge in the church. For others the return to the faith is a regression to their childhood beliefs and conduct. In still others can be seen the influence of the author's jansenistic principles: salvation through the grace of God, regardless of the type of life lived. Closely linked together with this aspect, is the consideration of morality. Whether Mauriac's novels can be considered moral or not, is very hard to determine. The interpretation of the reader enters here, and is dependent upon whether or not he is a Roman Catholic, whether he con-

²Mauriac, Trois Récits, p. xix.

siders Mauriac a Roman Catholic writer, whether he feels that most of the characters are sick, or what he, the reader, reads in between the lines. The question arises, shall the Roman Catholic writer preach his religion in his books, omitting the other aspects of life, like vice, and the attractions of the flesh? J. L. Brown in an article entitled "Mauriac and the Catholic Novel" has quoted a judgment given by Mauriac himself, defining the duty of a Roman Catholic writer:

. . . Not to scandalize and not to lie--
not to excite the desire of the flesh and
yet not to falsify life. . .³

This is an answer, but not a solution to the problem. On the other hand Mauriac says that all the "Dark Angels" he has painted, are only the evil aspects that each of us has. He considers the depicting of all his dreadful characters the best defense of religion.

. . . Il lui semblait que cette ignominie
des âmes privées de la Grâce dans un monde
athé, était la meilleur des apologies du
christianisme. . .⁴

³J. L. Brown, "François Mauriac and the Catholic Novel," Catholic World, 49:36-49, April, 1939.

⁴Fidus, op. cit., p. 797.

Maybe these endings are only a pattern to a satisfactory end, which is in accordance with the author's personality.

Mauriac's style is a very clear and concise one. Not a word or sentence too much. One has the impression that the moment he starts to write he has a total picture of what he is going to describe. He uses the same technique for the presentation of spiritual problems as he does for depicting his people and his landscapes. Mauriac sketches them with a few vital lines, leaving many things to the imagination of the reader. The lack of details offers him also the opportunity to use the same settings again and again. One can read in various novels the same description of a house or a landscape and get a different image of them. His actions and dialogues move forward so quickly, that they often give an impression of abruptness. Wallace Fowlie has summed up his opinion in this way:

. . . The actual form of his writing is lucid and direct. The chastity of his style permits him to say anything he wishes about his characters. The disorder of crime and chaotic mental states in the novels of Mauriac is offset by the sense of order which controls his writing. . .⁵

His dialogues are not frequent, for he thinks that

⁵Wallace Fowlie, "Mauriac's Dark Hero," Sewanee Review, 56:39-57, July, 1948.

the greatest tragedies in life are silent.

. . . The dramas of real life are most often played out in silence. In real life, so Mauriac tells us, Tristan and Isolde talk about the weather and Isolde inquires whether the coffee is strong enough. He then goes on to the discouraging conclusion that a novel written in perfect conformity to life would consist only of a series of hyphens and dashes. . . .⁶

Mauriac's novels are definitely dramatic in character. The passions that torment his characters acquire tragic proportions. No humor or irony can be found. Fowle has said very exactly:

. . . In Mauriac's mind everything becomes drama: love, passion, family, poverty, nature, evil, religion, grace. . . .⁷

He started to write in 1909, and no great evolution can be seen in his works. We find in all of them the tyranny of human passions, passions which are evil and degrading.

Le Baiser au lépreux is considered the best novel of the first period (1923). William Drake has said of it:

. . . It is a serious evangelistic document, directed against the system of intellectual rejection represented in the

⁶Neil C. Arvin, "François Mauriac", Sewanee Review, 50:371, July, 1942.

⁷Op. cit., p. 57.

philosophy of Nietzsche. . .⁸

In later novels can be found deeper and more involved psychological problems. The "why" of existence is asked. Metaphysical problems in general are of importance. Religion is no longer introduced in such a naive way. These works show more maturity, although there is much repetition of circumstances. In all of the first books, the characters are saved by Grace, although they may have had to struggle all their lives without finding peace and tranquility. An evolution in this aspect can be seen in comparing those books with Les Anges noirs written in 1936. For the first time an individual considers the possibility of finding peace in nature. Gabriel Gradere, sitting in the park in Liogeats says:

. . . Seul un homme de ma sorte peut aimer profondément cet univers adorable et sans regard et sans conscience pour nous juger, monde odorant, plein de bêtes et d'astres, et qui ne sait pas qu'il existe des saints et des damnés, des êtres sauvés et des êtres perdus. . .⁹

For the maintenance of his fame, he should change

⁸William Drake, Contemporary European Writers, p. 270.

⁹Mauriac, Les Anges noirs, p. 41

his vein, and find other motivating forces. This, of course, is difficult requiring a new phase in the spiritual evolution of the author.

The following quotation is of interest because it illustrates Mauriac's relation to his work.

. . . A peine avons-nous fini d'écrire le dernier chapitre d'un roman, que l'ouvrage paraît, tiède encore de notre chaleur, chargé de nos goûts, de nos inclinations du moment, si mal dégagé de nous-mêmes qu'ils ne faut pas confondre avec la vanité notre impatience à souffrir les critiques; car c'est un peu de notre chair vivante que nous avons livrée. Aussi un auteur curieux de lui-même trouve-t-il plus de profit à réunir en volume des nouvelles écrites depuis assez de temps et publiées déjà par divers magasins. D'un lave qui fut brûlante, il détache ces blocs durcis, les mesure, les soupèse et les juge. Sans doute il s'y retrouve: même après beaucoup d'années, nous reconnaissons toujours la moindre phrase sortie de nous, fût-elle extraite d'un ouvrage ou d'un article dont nous avons perdu le souvenir. Aucune ligne qui ne soit frappé à l'effigie de son auteur, mais aussi qui ne porte un milliesime: nous y reconnaissons notre visage, mais notre visage d'une certaine année, notre cœur à un moment précis de son drame. Pour l'histoire de notre vie intérieure le roman que parfois nous donnons à une revue avant même qu'il soit achevé, ne constitue donc pas un témoignage plus exacte que telle nouvelle depuis longtemps écrite; et que nous avons peine à le juger de sang-froid. Son unique avantage sur la nouvelle est de fixer la limite de la plus récente marée (j'aime cette image du flux et du reflux autour d'un roc central -passion ou croyance- qui exprime à la fois l'unité de la personne humaine, ses changements, ses retours et ses remous. . .¹⁰

¹⁰Mauriac, Trois Récits, pp. vii-ix.

The above was published as an article under the title "Mes Personnages" and later included as the preface to the book Trois Récits. From it we see that many of Mauriac's own traits and thoughts can be found in these characters and that many of their problems may have been his own, at a certain time of his life.

Mauriac in presenting these characters has wanted to show the deep conflicts that exist within each individual. He experienced perhaps a deep satisfaction in uncovering the hypocritical environment in which he grew up. He shows above all the struggle between the drives and restraints that can be found in every person. The moral deviation present in some of his people is a result of their emotional condition. Likewise the physical illnesses are often cases of hysteria.

His interest is to satisfy a personal need for expression, to reveal, as he sees it, the society in which he lives, its struggle and problems.

The inaccuracies lie, then, not in his failure as a writer, but in his failure as a person, being constantly illustrated in the inability of his characters to assume view points other than their own.

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